

in the audience.

**Israel.** Viva Hollywood! Yep, the Jewish group did it again. They presented a Levantine Wedding Festival and the whole performance smacked of grand opera. Everything—costumes, lighting effects, etc. were done on a grand scale and although we recognized the music, the choreography was really something of which any ballet group could be proud. They're really a terrific group of dancers but the whole performance was too theatrical for a folk festival.

**Philippines.** A group of Filipino doctors and nurses who are working in a St. Louis hospital presented the ever popular "Tinikling" beautifully. Their graceful movements in rhythm to the bamboo poles brought ohs and ahs from the audience.

**Cuba.** The Ministry of Education in Cuba sent a group of about 25 girls to the festival this year. They were really spectacular as to their costuming and dances especially in those wild congas and rumbas. The flirtatious dances, however, although faultlessly done fell a little short since they were all danced by girls. However, they were a definite asset to the program and were wildly acclaimed by all who saw them.

Besides the above, there were also some band and instrumental numbers, quartets of singers, a lumberjack orchestra with home made instruments, etc. Also, daily in the morning and afternoon there were workshops held in the opera building in the same hall where the after performance parties were held.

And so ended the 20th, very successful, National Folk Festival with the parting of friends, some new and some old, with promises of seeing each other once again next year at the 21st National Folk Festival to be held again next April in St. Louis.

\* \* \*

## OBON FESTIVAL

By JUNE LOESCH



Of all the religious dances in the world, none are more interesting and colorful than the Japanese Bon dances.

In French the word "bon" means good. In Japan it comes from the "Urabon" sutra or Buddhist scripture, which tells the story of the first dance of joy. So it means good in Japanese too.

The Obon Festival, or All Souls Day, held in July and August, is observed to honor the dead. Families visit the graveyards to pay homage, and services are held at the temples with offerings to the altar for those who have departed. At night, welcome fires are kindled and lanterns lighted to lead the spirits to their eternal rest.

Bon Odori is a folk-dance often seen during the Obon Festival. The dancers gather in the vicinity of the temple or shrine and dance into the night. The accompaniment

to the dance is very simple, usually the beating of drums, the clapping of hands, or sometimes the singing of a song. Each district may perform its own particular dances as well as those known generally all over the country. The fact that such a variety of these ancient dances should still be performed may be unique in the history of folk-dance. It would require several years for any one person to see them all in their native villages. But fortunately for those who are interested in having a glimpse of this Japanese folk festival without traveling to Japan, they will find it is still celebrated by many Japanese who have sailed away to other lands.

The time for the Obon Festival is determined by temple calendars, and since each are individualistic, this inconsistency stretches the Bon dance season over several weeks. This year in Japan, the festival will be held between July 12 and 17. The towns of Kiso, Sado, Awa and Siraisizima are well-known as especially fine places to see this peasant dance. In Honolulu, dates and places are printed in the daily newspapers, but the dances can be seen in some village nearly every week-end of July and August. In the United States, most cities with large Japanese communities will celebrate the festival. The following are a few of the 1954 dates:

|                    |                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| New York - July 17 | Sacramento - August 1   |
| Denver - August 15 | San Francisco - July 17 |
| Seattle - August 8 | Stockton - August 1     |

Camera fans will find the Bon dances especially good picture material as all the dancers are costumed in fancy kimono and yukata, and some wear painted cloths about the head and masks over their faces.

— \* —

### "TO BE OR NOT TO BE"

"To be or not to be" as far as the folk-dancer is concerned can mean just one much-discussed topic—authenticity. I think it is time we took a moment to think about "authenticity" and what it is exactly that we are trying to do when we dress up in the costumes of another country and do their dances. If, in a small way we are trying to duplicate, in our own time and place, a tiny bit of history—if we are trying to show the costumes, style, and spirit of a particular country in a particular period of their history, then, if we do not present the costume and style as closely as possible to the original, we run the risk of having a poor counterfeit as our end result.

A producer in Hollywood has the same problems when he wants to make a picture showing a certain period. He must employ many researchers to dig up all the facts on the costume, background, modes and morals of life, and the general culture of the period. If he makes mistakes or is careless of even the smallest details the picture loses its original intent and he defeats his purpose. So it is in our costume and dance work, especially in exhibitions: we must forget that we are 20th century Americans accustomed to certain ideas in dress and dance which we have been learning all our lives and try to imagine ourselves in the circumstances of the people we are trying to portray. We would take a dim view of anyone's presenting a 100-year-old Danish dance in jitterbug style and it is just as wrong to adapt 100-year-old costumes to modern ideas of style, line, or fashion. Our styles of today may seem just as absurd to others a century from now as the old costumes seem to us, but we must remember that we are trying to show a small part of another's culture, and if we do not do it with great attention to detail we are defeating our purpose. If we can bring to life a village scene in Poland, correct in all details, we can be proud of our contribution to the understanding of one people who added their share to the world we live in. We would be bringing to life a page of history.

MARJORIE C. POSNER

## 1954 STATEWIDE FESTIVAL



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: 1) Madelynne Greene and partner in the comic Accordion Serenade (Ukrainian). 2) Vivian Woll and Harold Sullivant of San Diego in the elegant Copelia Mazur of the Polish Panstwa. 3) An excellent trio who did beautifully a high stepping Irish Jig. 4) Arab "Sheiksies" in their cymbal dance. (Fotos by Art Noble).

— • —

Long Beach, California was the site for the 1954 Statewide Folk Festival during the Memorial Day week-end. As expected of Californian affairs, it was a tremendous festival and a huge success with thousands participating and thousands viewing and dancing for days, plus, plus.

Overall observations are 1) that it is a truly wonderful picture to behold. Happy people, happy faces, happy dancing feet. 2) International folk dancers are friendlier and more broad in their views and behavior than square dancers. While the folk dancers always inserted square dances after every so many international dances and even allotted a separate hall for square dancing, too, the square dancers in their hall didn't do a single folk dance, nor did they care to mix with the folk dancers and some were even annoyed when folk dance demonstrations were sent down to entertain them. 3) The Californian folk dancers still think that the only material which they deem demonstrational has to be Ukrainian, or its related Kazatskies, and that it has to be theatric and spectacular. Ukraina was the most represented country during the four demonstrational days. Some of these Ukrainian demonstrations had the folk feel; Don Landauers' Tatarochka, David Young's Sokyra, the Yula of the Santa Monicans and Fresno's (Wilma Graesch) Katarina (more anon). 4) That no couple dances meant for men and women, especially Spanish and Mexican, should ever be danced either solo or with another female to replace a male. One may get by with it in the dead-pan Irish dances but not in such where flirtation and playfulness is required. 5) Spanish dancing looks good only when professional or semi professional groups do. It is not a type of dance learned in ten-easy lessons and ready for demonstration.

To go back to the Kazatski dances: The group of youngsters from the Ojai Happy Valley School, trained by David Young, were, by far the most folkish presentation for the Ukrainian style of dance. The youngsters were out of this world and a genuine demonstration (in dance portrayal) of a happy Ukrainian village scene. It was "terrific" ten times over. Besides the Ojai group and the above mentioned, the Hutzulsky dance of Grace San Filippo, tho stagy, still had the folk feeling, but Azrebeyjan, a Caucasian number heavily peppered with Kazatski stuff, true, a most excellently trained group of fine dancers, was

definitely a theatric concert piece. Mr. Joukovsky, a superb instructor of repute, choreographed a number of the dances for the festival, seems to be more concerned with the theatric and stupendous angle for pure stage-concert work rather than to capture the spirit of folk as did the Ojai group and most non-Ukrainian demonstrating groups. It has also now reached such a point among Kazatski dancers (as it did among tap dancers)—that it has become much too common place and one group tries to vie with the other group to out do the other with more breath taking feats which leaves the spectator swooning and the dancer on a verge of exhaustion. This is not a healthy state. There is just as much beauty in the quiet dances as in the neck breaking ones.

The Accordion Serenade by Madelynne Greene and partner was another remodeled Ukrainski presentation. No matter what Madelynne will do with her terrific ability for mimicry she will always succeed in winning the audience. Her group, at another time, also presented a Bornean Harvest dance from Devi Dja's repertoire and it was presented most credibly.

The VILTIS dancers of San Diego and Vinehoppers of Fresno combined forces to present a winning Lithuanian agricultural scene. This section demonstrated my contention that the quiet dances can be just as spectacular as the neck-breaking ones. The scene was heart warming, down to earth and doing the Lithuanians proud. The multi-figured mill composed of a simple running step, was flawless and colorful. The harvest dance Rugučiai was nostalgic, Mikita and Kubilas well done and vivacious. The VILTIS dancers on a later day performed simple Arab semi circle dances and once again they succeeded to evoke a sincere and loud applause from the attentive audience. The Mazur of San Diego's Tuesday Nighters also proved that one can remain true to folk form and character of a nation and still be spectacular. Circle Eight of Bakersfield succeeded to retain full folk flavor and presenting a spectacular scene with their Hungarian presentation. Millie Von Konsky's group did their Csardas correctly and elegantly.

Not always do Scottish and Irish dances captivate an audience of non-Kelts, but an Irish trio and Howard Bell's Scot flingers were excellent. A star performer was Carlos Carvahal whose feet during the flings and kicks vibrated like wings of a bird in flight. Wonderful!

The Czech Beseda presented by several dozen youngsters, was not ready for presentation. Perhaps in another year and with intense training. They did the full length of it mixing traditional and American versions and when it is badly done it becomes a burden on the spectator. A relief for that Monday afternoon performance was the Japanese Eel Fisher, presented ably by Clinton Taylor, and the